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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: July 09, 2007

Alien And Immigration Laws To Be Toppled?

11. The Interior Ministry's Human Rights Advisory Board has come to the conclusion that the Austrian immigration and alien laws need to be amended, as they are not in compliance with the EU's Human Rights Convention. Because the Convention is part of the Austrian Constitution, the Advisory Board has ruled Austria's alien and immigration legislation unconstitutional.

All major Austrian media report on a ruling by the Interior Ministry's Human Rights Advisory Board declaring part of the Austrian alien and immigration laws unconstitutional in a report published on Monday. A task force for the Advisory Board, which was looking into the execution of the country's immigration laws, has found the legislation "severely deficient," ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal says. Particularly, the law "does not give the authorities working on asylum and immigration cases sufficient opportunity to fully take into account Article 8 of the European Human Rights Convention," which protects people's personal and family lives, the Advisory Board concluded. In its report for the Interior Minister, the Advisory Board therefore recommends that the execution of alien and immigration laws be amended, and calls on the minister to make sure the authorities concerned strictly observe the laws.

Experts on Coalition Government

12. Austrian political analysts rate as "rather poor" the performance so far of the SPOe-OeVP grand coalition. Since the formation of the government half a year ago, cooperation between the country's two major parties has largely been marked by conflicts, disputes and communication problems, with few actual results to show for, the group of experts including Peter Filzmaier and Anton Pelinka says. ORF online news publishes an assessment by Austrian political analysts of the SPOe-OeVP government. According to Peter Filzmaier, the coalition partners have been "blocking each other," particularly on issues such as the debate over the Eurofighter deal. Communication between the Social Democrats and the People's Party was seriously impaired, given that they had only agreed to "forced cooperation" in a coalition government because the result of the 2006 general elections presented no other viable option. As a result, the government had so far largely come up with provisional results rather than presenting actual political solutions. Likewise, political analyst Peter Pelinka, stressing that he had hoped for serious discussions of Austria's immigration, defense and EU policies, complained that instead of addressing these key issues, the coalition with its internal squabbles was playing the role of government and opposition at the same time.

Banking Committee: Call For Reforms

13. The chairman of the parliamentary investigative committee looking into banking practices in the wake of the scandal involving former union-owned bank Bawag called for reforms to ensure better oversight of banks and financial markets. Martin Graf of the Freedom Party presented his recommendations to Parliament last week, after parties were unable to agree on a final written report. Reporting on the recommendations presented to Parliament by the investigative committee looking into Austrian banking practices, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says that the chairman of the committee, Martin Graf of the FPÖ, urged that the Financial Market Control Board should be reformed and limited to five persons with terms rotating every three years. This caused a strong debate in Parliament's plenary session last week, the daily adds. Graf also accused the government parties, the Social Democrats and the People's Party, of ending the parliamentary inquiry before its work was concluded. He said this was the first time in post-WWII Austria that a parliamentary investigation had ended without a written report being submitted and voted on by the parties represented in Parliament. The committee had been looking into major losses at banks Bawag and Hypo Alpe Adria, along with the financial services group AMIS.

Cleaning Up a Graveyard

14. Austrian media report that several US marines and a group of US Embassy Vienna employees started cleaning a historic Jewish cemetery in Vienna's 18th district Waehring on Sunday. "Development aid made in the US," headlines liberal daily Der Standard, reporting on the efforts last Sunday by a group of US marines and US Embassy employees to clean up a historic Jewish cemetery in Vienna. Bringing their own tools, the volunteers cleaned weeds and shrubs and cleared walking paths at the run-down site. Efforts to have the Waehring cemetery cleaned and renovated have been going on for years, but as a result of virtually non-existent political decision-making power, the site remained in a state of continual disrepair, the daily explains. This also turned out to be a major setback for Austrian historian Tina Walzer, who had been commissioned by the fund Zukunftsfonds to catalogue the 7,000 graves. Shocked about the poor condition of the historic graveyard, a US diplomat recently promised he would "send in the boys." In the end, not only the marines turned up, but also a group of embassy representatives, the daily notes. Likewise, mass-circulation daily Kurier reports on the US marines' "clearing mission," pointing out that the City of Vienna's earlier promises to restore the site had been no more than "lip service." The daily also quotes the American volunteers as underscoring they had no intention whatsoever to embarrass Vienna with their activity, they "only wanted to help out." In a commentary in liberal daily Der Standard, Michael Simoner argues that the "political delaying tactics has now culminated in the disgraceful situation where US marines stationed in Austria and American diplomats began on Sunday to clear the jungle the Jewish cemetery in Vienna's 18th district has meanwhile become." He adds that "where there is a will, there is a way. And the Austrian Republic feels the political slap in the face. Let's see whether there will be any words of thanks for the Americans."

Ambassador McCaw Ends Her Assignment

15. Like all media, a leading Austrian weekly reported that US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw will end her assignment "for personal reasons" toward the end of this year. The Ambassador described her time in Austria as one of the "most remarkable and rewarding experiences" of her life, independent political weekly Profil says in its July 9 issue.

Islamabad Mosque Siege Continues

16. The siege at the Red Mosque in the Pakistani capital Islamabad has entered another week with no sign of resolution. Pakistan's Minister for Religious Affairs said that radical Islamists were holding women and children hostage inside the mosque complex. The

mosque's leader, Abdul Rashid Ghazi, threatened that he and his followers would commit suicide rather than surrender. The Pakistani military has meanwhile apparently decided to delay a planned storming of the mosque.

Like all Austrian media, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten reports on the "war of nerves" in the standoff between Pakistani security forces and radical Islamists at the Red Mosque in Islamabad. Concern is growing that the crisis could end in a bloodbath with potentially disastrous consequences, as hundreds of women and children are still said to be held hostage in the compound. The Pakistani government has therefore refrained from storming the mosque up to now, the daily explains. Meanwhile, a high-ranking representative of the Pakistani Interior Ministry has warned that the authorities are running out of time, given the risk of Red Mosque followers launching similar actions elsewhere in the country. That is why the conflict has also triggered a massive propaganda war, which is being waged alongside the "battle over the Red Mosque," the Salzburger Nachrichten states.

Livni, Fayyad Meet for Talks

[17](#). Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for the first time since the new Fatah-led government was appointed last month. Austrian media say the meeting in Jerusalem is a sign of improving relations between Israel and the new Palestinian government. A spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert explained that Israel sees the new Palestinian government as "an opportunity."

ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal, reporting on the meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Palestinian Premier Salam Fayyad, says that a spokesperson for the Israeli Minister welcomed the discussion. The new Palestinian leadership was a "government which clearly has accepted the international principles - not only the recognition of Israel, but especially the renouncing of terrorism and the idea of a two-state solution." A Palestinian minister meanwhile replied that while relations are improving, the situation of the Palestinian people also needed to get better, which until now had failed to happen. Palestinians were now waiting for the Israeli goodwill to show tangible results, the minister added. ORF radio also says that in another move aimed at supporting the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, an Arab League delegation will visit Israel this week. It is the first visit to Israel by Arab League representatives.

McCaw